

WASHINGTON POST _____
 NEW YORK TIMES 8
 WALL STREET J. _____
 WASHINGTON TIMES _____

DATE 16 OCT-88

STAT

8

U.S. Weighs Easing of Strains With North Korea

By ELAINE SCIOLINO
 Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 15 — The United States is expected to take some modest but symbolically important steps toward opening diplomatic and trade contacts with North Korea as proposed by Seoul, State Department officials said today.

Although the officials emphasized that no final decision has been made, they indicated that President Reagan is likely to give the South Korean President, Roh Tae Woo, some assurances of the Administration's willingness to make a limited overture to the Government of Pyongyang when the two lead-

ers meet briefly in Washington on Thursday.

It is unclear when the Administration will announce its decision.

Among the steps under active consideration are the resumption of limited diplomatic contact between United States and North Korean officials, relaxation of the visa restriction on North Korean nationals and encouragement of unofficial exchanges.

The Administration is also examining what one official called "a more lenient approach" to the Trading With the Enemy Act, which prohibits trade with "enemy" countries and has been applied to North Korea. The Adminis-

tration may extend certain exemptions under the act to North Korea, such as the delivery of "humanitarian items" such as food and medicine.

At this time, however, the United States is not expected to remove North Korea from the State Department's list of countries that support terrorism. Nor is there any intention of lifting decades-old trade sanctions.

'Pressing Us to Do Something'

"South Korea has been pressing us to do something to help draw the North out of its isolation and we're looking at what we might do," one State Department official said. "It's fair to say that

we'll be taking some steps in close coordination with South Korea in the wake of Roh's visit."

In the spring of 1987 the United States initiated a policy of allowing meetings between American and North Korean diplomats and slightly eased visa restrictions on North Koreans coming to the United States. But after the North Korean bombing of a Korean Air Lines jet late last year in which all 115 people were killed, the initiative was canceled and North Korea was added to the terrorism list.

Japan also imposed punitive sanctions after the bombing, which it lifted in September, just before the opening of the Olympic Games.

The Administration's move is intended to be a positive response to Mr. Roh's three-month-old campaign to ease tensions with his neighbor to the

north by enlisting the support of other countries and of the United Nations.

North Koreans Set Conditions

Special to The New York Times

TOKYO, Oct. 15 — North Korean officials said today that they welcomed a recent proposal by President Roh for a summit meeting in Pyongyang with their leader, Kim Il Sung. But they said Mr. Roh could not come until legislators and military leaders from both nations meet and the South revises anti-Communist laws.

The Korean Central News Agency, North Korea's official press service, said in a broadcast monitored in Tokyo that Mr. Roh's proposal, made in a speech to the South Korean legislature on Oct. 4, "deserves welcome."

Mr. Roh, responding to Mr. Kim's Sept. 8 invitation to a summit meeting, said he would travel to Pyongyang and talk without any conditions. But Mr. Kim had called on the South to first sign a nonaggression pact and promise to withdraw American troops from South Korea.

Before a summit meeting could take place, the North Korean press agency quoted North Korean officials as saying, Seoul must take several steps.

"An early convocation of a North-South joint parliamentary meeting will be an important occasion in helping arrange North-South top-level talks," said a statement issued in Pyongyang on Friday.

North Korea also said the South must abolish its strict national security law and end its ban on Communism.